

July 14, 2010
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
 Fisheries Bureau
 Endangered Species Coordinator
 Native Species Coordinator, Fisheries Division
 Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Wayne Hadley, 1016 Eastside Road, Deer Lodge, MT 59722
Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59715
North Powell Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, P.O. Box 1, Ovando, MT 59854
Mannix Family, 364 Mannix Ranch Drive, Helmville, MT 59843

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling to replace an undersized and perched culvert crossing located on North Fork Frazier Creek, a tributary to Frazier Creek in the Blackfoot drainage, with a larger open bottom arch culvert. The intent of the project is to improve upstream passage for a genetically pure and disjunct population of westslope cutthroat trout. This proposed culvert replacement is located on the Mannix Ranch approximately 6 miles south of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., August 15, 2010 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Funding for this project through the Future Fisheries Improvement Program is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Section
Fisheries Bureau
e-mail: mlere@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
North Fork Frazier Creek Culvert Replacement Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 that directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. The program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program.

The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the replacement of an undersized and perched culvert located at a private road crossing on North Fork Frazier Creek with a larger open bottom arch culvert. The intent of the project is to improve fish passage for a disjunct and non-hybridized population of westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located on an existing culvert crossing approximately 6 miles south of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on an existing private road crossing on North Fork Frazier Creek located within Township 14 North, Range 12 West, Section 28 in Powell County (Attachment 1).

II. Need for the Project: One goal within Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to “restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats” by implementing habitat restoration projects and administering the Future Fisheries Improvement Program to restore important habitats on private and public lands. This proposed project would help meet this goal.

North Fork Frazier Creek is a tributary to Frazier Creek that flows through approximately 2 miles of private land. North Fork Frazier and Frazier creeks support a non-hybridized and disjunct population of westslope cutthroat trout with no other species of fish present. This population of westslope cutthroat trout has conservation value and could be enhanced by eliminating the fragmentation caused by an existing culvert located on the stream (Attachment 2). Currently, migratory connectivity to the upper 1.7 miles of the stream is impaired. This project calls for replacing this existing culvert with a larger open bottom arched pipe.

III. Scope of the Project:

The existing culvert crossing consists of two foot round pipe that is 18 feet in length. Bankfull channel width at an adjacent reference reach was determined to be approximately 5 feet. This project proposes to replace the existing culvert with an open bottom arch pipe that is 7 feet in width and 20 feet in length. The proposed culvert dimensions follow stream simulation guidelines for stream crossings. A rock cross vane would be installed near the outlet of the new bottomless arch pipe to provide for grade control and channel

stability. This project is expected to cost \$9,805.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$4,420.00. The remainder of the funding would come from outside sources and in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner	\$800.00	
USFWS	\$1,260.00	
Big Blackfoot chapter TU		\$3,325.00

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

Replacing an undersized and perched culvert with a properly sized bottomless arch pipe would enhance upstream passage for all aquatic organisms and improve migratory connectivity with the upper 1.7 miles of the stream. This proposed project would not threaten the genetic integrity of the westslope cutthroat trout population since these fish would continue to remain isolated from all non-native fish found in downstream waters.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short-term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, the operation of equipment in the active stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota (318 authorization). A 310 permit (Montana Natural Streambed and Land Preservation Act) will be obtained from the local conservation district and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers will be contacted to determine the need to meet 404 provisions of the Clean Water Act.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be temporarily disturbed during construction. All disturbed areas would be re-vegetated with a native grass seed mix.

5. Aesthetics.

In the short term, aesthetics would be adversely impacted due to ground disturbance and the presence of heavy construction equipment.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources.

Enhancing migratory connectivity to the upper 1.7 miles of North Fork Frazier Creek is expected to benefit a non-hybridized and disjunct population of westslope cutthroat trout.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The project site previously has been disturbed by the construction and maintenance of the existing stream crossing. As a result, there is a very low likelihood that cultural properties will be impacted by the proposed project. Should cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during the project, the State Historic Preservation Office will be contacted and the site will be investigated.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

14. Transportation networks & traffic flows.

The stream crossing is located on a private road. As a result, no public traffic would be delayed, interrupted, or re-routed during construction.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no funding is provided, the applicant would have to either seek other sources of funding to complete the project or the existing road crossing would continue to act as a partial barrier to upstream fish migration, as well as for other aquatic organisms. Migratory connectivity to the upper 1.7 miles of stream would remain impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to provide partial funding to aid in replacing an existing undersized culvert on North Fork Frazier Creek with a properly sized bottomless arch pipe. The project is expected to improve migratory connectivity for native westslope cutthroat trout without threatening their genetic isolation.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future

Fisheries Improvement Program. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission also will review the proposed project and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA also will be published on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks webpage: fwp.mt.gov.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on August 15, 2010

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Section
Fisheries Bureau
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620
Telephone: (406) 444-2432
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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title North Fork Frazier Creek Culvert Replacement Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Bureau -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for replacing an undersized and perched culvert located on North Fork Frazier Creek with a properly sized bottomless arch pipe. The intent of the project is to enhance upstream fish passage for a genetically pure and disjunct population of westslope cutthroat trout. The project site is located on the Mannix Ranch approximately 6 miles south of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

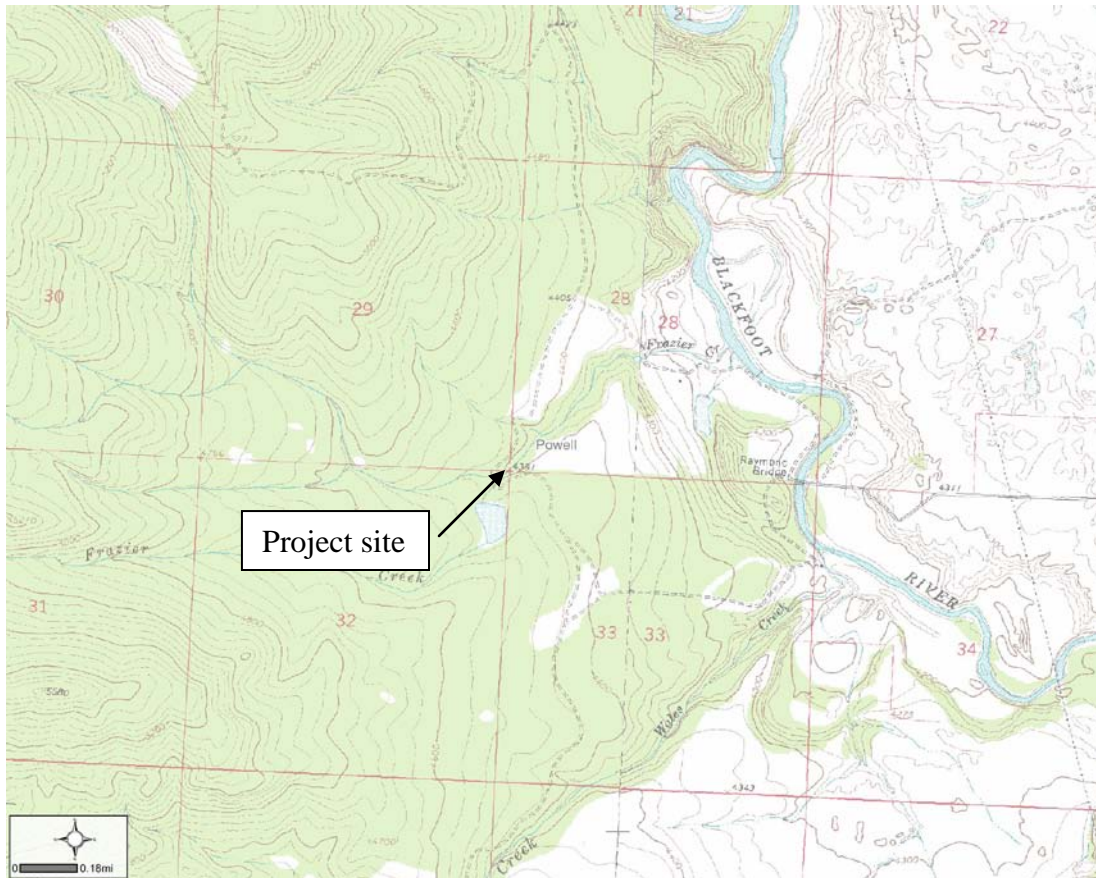
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		X

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction North Powell Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Ryen Aasheim, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.

EA prepared by: Mark Lere

Date: July 12, 2010



Map showing location of culvert on North Fork Frazier Creek

ATTACHMENT 1



Photos 1-2: North Fork Frazier Creek outlet and road heave.

ATTACHMENT 2